DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 405 EA 032 572

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TITLE	Implementation of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops.
INSTITUTION	Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	2002-04-00
NOTE	25p.; With assistance from Peg Hoppe, Patricia Kannappel, Betty Bennett, and Donna Harris.
AVAILABLE FROM	Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 3440 Market Street, Suite 560, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3325. Tel: 215-573-0700; Fax: 215-573-7914; e-mail: cpre@gse.upenn.edu; Web site: http://www.gse.upenn.edu/cpre/. For full text: http://www.cpre.org/Publications/AC-03.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; *Literacy; National Surveys; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Teacher Influence

ABSTRACT

This report provides feedback on emerging trends in the implementation of the America's Choice school design. It seeks evidence of the impacts of the design, focusing on the literacy workshops in America's Choice, by using accepted standards of evaluation design and analysis methodologies. The evaluation asks three central questions: Is America's Choice being carried out in the manner envisioned? Are teachers' instructional practices changing in ways that would improve student learning? To what degree can improvements in student achievement be attributed to the design? To answer these questions, the report draws on surveys of teachers and administrators in 23 America's Choice schools nationwide. It also relies on information gathered through site visits to schools across the country, through telephone interviews, through document reviews, through observations of professional development, and through student-performance measures. It concludes that about 40 percent of teachers exhibited solid or exemplary implementation of the literacy workshop structures. There were differences in the depth with which teachers understood, interpreted, and enacted the standards-based instructional philosophy underlying the literacy workshops, demonstrating variation in both the fidelity and depth with which teachers understood and implemented the workshops. However, in general, students reported reading and writing far more than in past years. (RJM)

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with assistance from

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April 2002

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to the memory of a dear colleague, Peg Hoppe. Peg was a longstanding contributor at CPRE at the University of Pennsylvania. Her sharp wit and analytical skills brought a great deal to the projects she worked on, including the evaluation of America's Choice. She will be often missed and always remembered.

About the America's Choice Design

The America's Choice School Design is a K-12 comprehensive school reform model designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy. America's Choice focuses on raising academic achievement by providing a rigorous standards-based curriculum and safety net for all students. The goal of America's Choice is to make sure that all but the most severely handicapped students reach an internationally benchmarked standard of achievement in English language arts and mathematics by the time that they graduate.

America's Choice does not offer schools a script or a paint-by-numbers approach to reformed instruction. America's Choice recognizes that the pace of change will vary from school to school and the model does not have a rigid three-year implementation schedule. Rather, the core of the design contains a set of principles about the purpose of schooling and how schools should operate as well as a set of tools for building a program based on those principles. The essential principles and tools include:

- **High expectations** for student performance that specify what students should know and be able to do at certain educational junctures. These standards are explicitly expressed through the *New Standards Performance Standards* that provide a common set of expectations for students and teachers.

- **An initial focus on literacy** that features elements of phonics, oral language, shared books, guided and independent reading, daily writing, and independent writing.

- **A common core curriculum** that is aligned with the standards. Through the America's Choice *literacy workshops, Core Assignments, and Foundations of Advanced Mathematics*, school life is organized around a core curriculum.

- **Standards-based assessments**, including *the New Standards Reference Examination*, that are aligned with the standards and the core curriculum, and that provide detailed feedback to teachers and students about student skill levels in relation to standards.

- **A distributed school leadership structure**, led by the school's principal, that coordinates implementation, analyzes results and sets performance targets, implements safety net programs to provide time for students to receive additional instruction, ensures the necessary resources, and aligns schedules and other school activities with implementation of the design.

- **Safety nets** that are structured into the school day and year and that provide students with extensive support and multiple opportunities to achieve the standards.

- **A commitment** to teacher professionalism that enables teachers to function as full professionals by providing ongoing, on-site professional development and support that is aligned with the standards and in which content and pedagogy are intimately connected.

In order to become an America's Choice school, over 80% of a school's faculty must indicate their commitment to the America's Choice design and agree to implement the program over three years. Each school must assign personnel as coaches to lead the implementation of the

design, and a parent/community outreach coordinator who ensures that students get needed support services.

Evaluation of America's Choice

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania was contracted by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) to conduct the external evaluation of the America's Choice School Design in 1998. Each year CPRE designs and conducts a series of targeted studies on the implementation and impacts of the America's Choice design. The report presented here is one of this year's evaluation reports.

The purpose of CPRE's evaluation is to provide formative feedback to NCEE and America's Choice schools about emerging trends in the implementation of the design, and to seek evidence of the impacts of the design using accepted high standards of evaluation design and analysis methodologies.

CPRE's evaluation of America's Choice is guided by three overarching evaluation questions about the implementation and impact of the design. First, is America's Choice being carried out in the manner envisioned—that is, how are teachers and school administrators understanding and implementing the many facets of the America's Choice reform design? Second, as a result of their implementation of America's Choice, are the instructional practices of teachers changing in ways that would improve student learning? Third, to what degree can improvements in student achievement be attributed to the design? Within this framework, annual evaluation studies target specific aspects of the America's Choice design for more in-depth investigation.

To address these questions, the CPRE evaluation team gathers a broad array of qualitative and quantitative data to develop a rich and valid picture of the implementation process over time and to capture the impacts of the design on students and teachers. Our data sources include:

- Surveys of teachers and administrators in America's Choice schools nationwide.
- Site visits to schools across the country to observe classroom instruction, examine implementation artifacts, and interview teachers, students, and school administrators.
- Telephone interviews with NCEE staff, school faculty members, and school and district administrators.
- Document reviews.
- Observations of national, regional, and school-level professional development.
- Collection of a variety of student performance measures, including state and local tests, the New Standards Reference Examination, and more authentic samples of student work products.

After data collection, CPRE research team members analyze the data using appropriate qualitative and quantitative research techniques in order to identify patterns of intended and unintended consequences and to detect effects of the design on students, teachers, and schools. The results are reported in a series of thematic evaluation reports that are released each year.

To inquire about the evaluation reports that are available, please contact CPRE's communications office at cpre@gse.upenn.edu, visit our web site at www.cpre.org, or call us at (215) 573-0700.

Executive Summary

Fostering literacy is at the heart of the America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform Design. Strong reading and writing skills are viewed as cornerstones of successful student performance in all subject areas. The readers and writers workshops, which together we call the literacy workshops, play a central role in moving all children toward high standards of performance. The workshops are designed to provide students with a rich immersion into the numerous skills and habits necessary to become fluent readers and writers. The structures of the literacy workshops are intended to facilitate teachers' analyses of student skills (as represented by their work) in relation to external standards for performance and to help them to provide students with repeated opportunities to develop the skills necessary to produce work that meets the standards. To effectively teach using the workshop structures requires teachers to adopt a series of specified classroom structures and pedagogical strategies.

This report examines the implementation of the literacy workshops in America's Choice classrooms across the United States. The results are based upon data collected from observations and interviews with a random sample of 42 elementary and middle school teachers in 23 America's Choice schools during the 2000-2001 school year. At the time of our fieldwork, the schools were either at the end of their first or second year implementing America's Choice. Our analyses focus on two areas: teachers' fidelity to the structures of the literacy workshops and their depth of understanding of the instructional philosophy and techniques upon which the workshops are based.

The findings of our research can be summarized around three areas:

Implementation

- About 40% of teachers exhibited solid or exemplary implementation of the literacy workshop structures.
- Another 45% of teachers were implementing some elements of the workshops, but integrated these with more traditional instructional techniques.
- More time implementing the literacy workshops may lead to higher levels of implementation. Lessons by teachers in schools in the second year of implementation were rated higher than lessons by teachers in first-year implementation schools.

Teacher Understanding

- There were differences in the depth with which teachers understood, interpreted, and enacted the standards-based instructional philosophy underlying the literacy workshops. For example, while many teachers held conferences with students during the independent work period, relatively few purposefully used conferences to work with students individually or in small group instruction. As another example, many teachers chose their lessons based upon external sources like textbooks and test preparation materials, rather than designing their lessons in response to student needs as measured against the performance standards.

Student Understanding

- Students reported reading and writing a great deal, far more than in past years. Thus, their exposure to, and experience with, books and writing were expanded. Although some students could articulate strategies they had learned to make themselves better readers and writers, many students reported that they relied on external assistance rather than developing a repertoire of strategies in order to become independent readers and writers.
- Most students were familiar with performance standards, but few saw them as a way to measure the quality of their work and many still relied on their teacher to tell them whether their work was good enough.

Thus, overall, we found much variation in both the fidelity and depth with which teachers understood and implemented the literacy workshops. While some teachers effectively used the structures of the literacy workshops to match instructional strategies to student need, others only partially implemented the workshop structures. We consider these results promising because they compare favorably to other reforms that CPRE has evaluated and because there is evidence that implementation grows stronger over time within America's Choice. There is, however, ample room for further improvement.

Introduction

This report is one in a series of studies conducted annually by CPRE as part of its evaluation of the America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform Design. In this report we evaluate the implementation of the main components of the America's Choice literacy program: readers and writers workshops. The report begins with a description of our research design and analysis methods, including the questions we sought to address, our strategy for sampling schools and classrooms to visit, and the analytic frameworks we developed to make sense of what we saw. We then discuss the results in two ways. First, we present our judgments of the fidelity of the classroom lessons that we observed to the America's Choice design. Second, we identify and discuss 10 key areas of the lessons we observed that appeared to differentiate between their quality. The report concludes with implications for deeper implementation.

Research Design and Analysis

In this study, CPRE researchers gauge the degree to which readers and writers workshops were being implemented in America's Choice schools across the nation during the 2000-2001 school year. More specifically, we sought to address three research questions:

- To what extent were teachers adopting the America's Choice workshop structures and standards-based instructional techniques aimed at helping children meet the standards?
- How did teachers understand the elements of the America's Choice literacy workshops and how were they incorporating their own beliefs and practices into their implementation?
- What aspects of the workshops were teachers readily implementing and what components were teachers having trouble implementing, and to what effect?

At the time of the study, there were about 200 schools in the first three cohorts of the America's Choice design. We decided to focus on the latter two cohorts of America's Choice schools as the design had undergone significant modifications since the first year. To address these research questions, CPRE researchers wanted a sample of classrooms from elementary and middle schools in cohort II which were at the end of their second year of the design and cohort III which were finishing their first year of the design.

Our sampling procedure followed several steps. First, we purposefully selected six locales in which America's Choice was being implemented: New York, Minnesota, Kentucky, Florida, the District of Columbia, and New Jersey, including both rural and urban districts. From within these six regions we randomly sampled 23 schools to visit for a single day. Schools were visited between February and May, 2001.

In communication with the school's design coach prior to our visit, we asked for a list of teachers who had been trained in either readers or writers workshop and who were preferably in either grades 3 or 4 in elementary schools or 7 or 8 in middle schools. We then randomly sampled from these lists to produce a representative sample of classrooms. The final sample included two first-grade teachers, five second-grade teachers, eight third-grade teachers, eight fourth-grade teachers, five sixth-grade teachers, seven seventh-grade teachers, and seven eighth-grade teachers.

Although the design called for two observations in each school, there were a few sites where CPRE researchers were not able to conduct two observations. The final sample, displayed in Table 1, included 42 observations in 23 schools. Twenty-five of these observations were in cohort II schools, and 17 were in cohort III schools. The observations in cohort II schools were distributed between elementary (grades 1-4) classes (13) and middle school (grades 6-8) classes (12). There were slightly more cohort III observations in elementary classes (10) than there were in middle school classes (7). Readers workshops were observed more frequently in

Table 1. Observations Conducted in America's Choice Schools

Grade Range	Cohort II	Cohort III	Readers Workshop	Writers Workshop
Elementary Classes (Grades 1-4)	13	10	5	18
Middle School Classes (Grades 6-8)	12	7	9	10
Total	25	17	14	28

middle school grades, and writers workshops were observed more frequently in elementary school grades.

During our site visits, researchers collected an array of data that contributed to an overall estimation of teachers' implementation, interpretation, and understanding of the America's Choice literacy workshop design. Our classroom observations could more accurately be called *classroom events* because they included more than just an observation of a lesson. Classroom events included four distinct activities from which researchers collected systematic information that contributed to implementation analyses. These were:

- Lesson observations in which we observed classroom instruction in reading or writing and documented in detail what teachers were doing, what materials were being used, and how students were interacting and responding.
- A post-observation interview with the classroom teacher in which we discussed the source, purpose, and execution of the lesson to better understand the teacher's goals and how they felt the lesson went.
- An examination of three types of classroom artifacts:
  - anything visibly posted on the classroom walls that provided evidence of performance standards, student work, past mini-lessons, etc.;
  - student sourcebooks or journals which provided evidence that students collected ideas for writing and practiced writing on a regular basis; and
  - teacher conference logs, which provided evidence that teachers had strategies, and kept track of their efforts, to conference purposefully and regularly with students.
- Interviews with a few students in each class to gain insight into how students understood and responded to the literacy workshops. In advance of researchers' visits, parental permission slips were sent to the design coach to have the teacher send home with students. We interviewed only those students whose parents granted permission for us to talk to their children.

Structure of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops

The literacy workshops are organized around a sequence of activities that include group and individual work periods of either reading or writing. The workshops feature elements on phonics, oral language, shared books, guided reading, independent reading, daily writing instruction, and independent writing. Ideally, schools should have a two or two-and-a-half hour literacy block, one hour for writers workshop, one hour for readers workshop, and a half-hour skills block. In many cases, middle schools have less time allotted for literacy workshops because of the middle school class schedule. Within the time period allotted for readers or writers workshop, there are certain rituals and routines that thread together and anchor the sequence of activities in the workshop time period. Both the readers and writers workshops follow the basic structure of a short mini-lesson followed by an extensive independent work period where students are given the opportunity to practice the topic of the mini-lesson. Workshops conclude with a closure

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session that should relate back to the mini-lesson.

Writers Workshop opens with a short mini-lesson of about 7-10 minutes. There are three kinds of mini-lessons: procedural, craft, and skills. Procedural mini-lessons specifically focus on the rituals and routines of the writers workshop. Craft mini-lessons are geared to teach the strategies that authors use to produce effective writing like technique, style, and genre. Skills mini-lessons address the conventions of English like spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphs. Skills mini-lessons often incorporate student writing by using examples of student written work where conventions need to be reviewed. An *independent work period*, lasting 35-45 minutes, should follow in which students are engaged in the writing process, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and polishing/publishing. Students work either individually or in small groups. *Response groups* provide students with an opportunity to elicit feedback on drafts from a partner or small group of peers. Writers workshop ends with a short (five minute) *closure session*, frequently author's chair, in which individual students share selections of their work in progress.

Readers Workshop is structured to begin with a whole-class meeting in which the class might do a shared reading and have a mini-lesson in a 15-20 minute time period. The mini-lesson can cover phonics-based skills, decoding word analysis, comprehension skills, or procedures. This mini-lesson is usually followed by a period of independent/guided reading and/or reading conference period in which a number of activities like partner reading or book talks occur for about 45 minutes. In *independent reading*, students focus on reading appropriately leveled texts for enjoyment and understanding. *Partner reading* allows students to work with slightly more difficult texts, practice reading aloud, and model "accountable talk" and "think-aloud" strategies. *Reading aloud* provides an opportunity for the teacher or other proficient reader to introduce authors or topics and model reading for the whole class. *Shared reading* allows the teacher to work with smaller groups of readers on reading strategies. Readers workshop may end with a *book talk* in which students share reactions to books read independently or to a book read aloud to the group.

CPRE Analytic Frameworks

In order to distinguish between the different gradations of implementation of the America's Choice literacy program, CPRE researchers developed two distinct analytical frameworks. The first framework examined *teachers' fidelity to the America's Choice structure of either readers or writers workshop*. The framework consists of a four-stage rubric to categorize the fidelity of lessons to the structural literacy workshop components of the America's Choice School Design. The four stages describe a scale of fidelity to the structure of the America's Choice literacy workshops. The reader should note that these stages are not necessarily correlated with instructional quality. Lessons that bore little resemblance to the America's Choice design could still have been engaging and effective instructional classes. The four stages are described below:

Stage 1: Absent or minimal structures of readers or writers workshop. At the first stage, what we observed in a classroom bore little or no resemblance to the structures of readers or writers workshop. In these cases, teachers essentially eschewed the workshop structure in favor of other instructional approaches. In an example from one classroom, the lesson consisted of a series of seemingly unrelated student activities. In another class, the students worked on a grammar worksheet in preparation for the impending state test. In these and other classes, researchers had a hard time detecting the America's Choice program in the observed structures and content.

Stage 2: Partial implementation of workshop structures. Classroom events at the second stage exhibited some evidence of the structures of the literacy workshops, but were missing some major component(s). This suggested that the teacher had a tenuous understanding of the purpose of the workshop. In some classes, large portions of the workshop structures were missing. For example, a mini-lesson that became a full-blown lesson, crowded out the

independent work period and closing session. In other classes, there was no connection between the mini-lesson and work that students were assigned to do during the independent work period, or the lesson lacked a brief closing session.

Stage 3: Solid adherence to workshop structures. These classes were faithful renditions of either readers or writers workshop. They consisted of a well-executed mini-lesson, an independent work period, and a closing session. However, these classes lacked details that indicated the teacher had a deep understanding of the purposes underlying the workshop structures.

Stage 4: Exemplary implementation of workshop. These exemplary lessons adhered not only to the workshop structures, but also contained evidence that the teacher had a deep understanding of the purposes behind the workshop structures. These teachers employed techniques that incorporated their own teaching style and talents into the workshop structures. For example, some teachers capitalized on the independent work period to purposefully meet with an individual student or a small number of students who required extra instruction on a concept. Other teachers derived their mini-lessons from an analysis of students' needs relative to the performance standards. Through these and other examples, teachers indicated that they understood the purposes underlying the structures of the America's Choice literacy workshops.

In the second analytical framework, CPRE researchers analyzed *teachers' interpretation and enactment of the standards-based instructional concepts underlying the America's Choice literacy workshop model.* Teachers who understood the standards-based instructional concepts underlying the literacy model inquired into students' learning and applied a variety of teaching strategies chosen to match content and instructional strategies with student learning needs. First, teachers had a practical, functioning familiarity with the standards for student performance. Second, they acquired an understanding of current student skill levels, usually through the investigation of student work to identify where student performance levels were in relation to the standards. Third, teachers planned and enacted classroom instruction to move student understanding toward the standards for performance. Fourth, teachers again assessed student understanding, as manifested in student work. Fifth, teachers re-taught, re-grouped, or moved on as necessary. And the process begins anew with each broad concept introduced in the classroom.

In observations of instruction and interviews with teachers, we could capture only parts of this complex process, and glimpses and indicators of others. Through the collective data we sought evidence that teachers had an understanding of this essential sequence of inquiry which underlies teachers' abilities to enact one of the cornerstones of the America's Choice literacy workshops, the New Standards Performance Standards.

We used a multi-step process to apply these frameworks to the data collected. First, we coded the data using qualitative computer software that allowed us to partition the data into categories, including protocol questions, lesson components, and themes. To arrive at lesson ratings, the descriptions of the classroom events were read by several team members and consensus ratings were achieved. In cases where there were disagreements, extensive conversations allowed us to reach agreement across members of the team. Through additional conversations and analyses of the components of the classroom events, the key areas distinguishing lesson quality emerged.

Results

In this section, we present the results of the analyses. First, we present the distribution of observations based upon the CPRE rating scale measuring the fidelity of observed lessons to the America's Choice literacy workshop structures. Second, we provide a detailed description of 10 emergent themes that differentiated teachers' understanding and interpretation of the standards-based pedagogical philosophy underlying the America's Choice literacy model.

Table 2. Ratings of Classroom Lessons

Category	Definition	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons
1	Absent or minimal adherence to structures of readers or writers workshop.	6	14%
2	Partial implementation of workshop structures.	19	45%
3	Solid adherence to workshop structures.	12	29%
4	Exemplary implementation of workshop.	5	12%

Table 3. Observations Decomposed by Grade Level*

	Elementary Grades (1-4)		Middle Grades (6-8)	
Category	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons
1	1	4%	5	26%
2	7	30%	12	63%
3	11	48%	1	5%
4	4	17%	1	5%

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Fidelity to the America's Choice Literacy Program

Based upon the analyses of our four-point rating scale, we examined the implementation of the America's Choice literacy workshop lessons in a number of ways. First, we assessed overall implementation. Second, we examined implementation by elementary and middle school classes. Third, we compared implementation by schools in cohort II and cohort III of America's Choice. Finally, we contrasted the implementation of readers and writers workshop lessons.

Overall, our random sample of observations produced the following distribution (see Table 2):

In six of the 42 classes (14%), we had trouble detecting the structures of readers or writers workshop. Nineteen of the 42 classes (45%) contained components of the workshop structures, but important elements were missing from these classes. In 12 of the 42 classes (29%), the classes were solid examples of implementing the structures of a readers or writers workshop. In five classes (12%), we witnessed an exemplary lesson, one in which all of the workshop structures were in place, and the teacher demonstrated that they had a deep understanding of the standards-based instructional concepts underlying the America's Choice literacy model.

Within these overall rankings of lessons, there are several ways to decompose the observations to examine trends in the implementation of the literacy workshops. In Table 3, we display the distribution of observations by elementary and middle schools. Because there were uneven numbers of observations completed in elementary and middle schools, the reader should focus on the proportion or percent of overall lessons rather than the actual number of lessons.

By comparing elementary and middle school observations in Table 3, the reader can see that the observations in elementary school classes had a higher degree of fidelity to the America's Choice literacy workshop design than did observations of classes in middle schools. Of the elementary school classes, 65% were rated as having at least solid implementation of the literacy workshop design (a rating of a 3 or 4), whereas 10 percent of those observed in middle schools exhibited at least solid fidelity to the literacy workshop design. These results indicate that elementary school teachers were having more success implementing the structures of the literacy workshops, whereas middle school teachers appeared to be struggling with the

implementation of readers and writers workshops structures.

Another way of examining the overall distribution of the ratings of the literacy workshops is to compare the fidelity to the workshop structures of teachers in cohorts II and III. At the time of this study, teachers in cohort III were in the spring of their first year implementing the design, while teachers in cohort II were completing their second year implementing the design. Although we did not ask teachers how long they had been implementing the literacy workshops, it would be reasonable to expect that, on average, teachers in cohort II would be implementing the literacy workshops more solidly than teachers in cohort III.

Table 4 contains the results of a comparison of cohorts II and III. The pattern visible in Table 4 is what one would hope to see: teachers in cohort II were more solidly implementing the literacy workshop structures than were teachers in cohort III. In cohort II, classrooms had a slightly smaller percentage of lessons that represented absent or minimal adherence to structures of readers or writers workshop in comparison to cohort III (12% compared to 18%), while in a larger percentage of the classes, teachers were solidly implementing the workshop structure (32% compared to 24%).

One final way to decompose the full observational sample was to look at readers workshop lessons in comparison to writers workshop lessons. Table 5 shows a comparison of the observed lessons of the two workshops. Overall, teachers appeared to be more comfortable with teaching the structures of writers workshop than they were teaching the structures of readers workshop. While almost half (46%) of the lessons in writers workshop we observed were either solidly implemented or exemplary, only about a quarter (28%) of readers workshop lessons were at least solidly implemented.

Table 4. Observations Decomposed by Cohort*

	Cohort II		Cohort III	
Category	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons
1	3	12%	3	18%
2	11	44%	8	47%
3	8	32%	4	24%
4	3	12%	2	12%

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5. Observations Decomposed by Readers and Writers Workshops*

	Readers Workshop		Writers Workshop	
Category	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons	Number of Lessons	Percent of Lessons
1	3	21%	3	11%
2	7	50%	12	43%
3	3	21%	9	32%
4	1	7%	4	14%

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

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Key Areas of Distinction Between Lessons of Differing Quality

By applying the second analytical framework—teacher understanding, interpretation, and enactment of the standards-based instructional concepts underlying the America's Choice literacy model—several themes emerged which differentiated the levels and depth of understanding of the literacy workshop design. These included student familiarity with classroom routines, sources of lessons, strategies for student engagement, teacher activities during independent work period, time allocation, the connection of lessons to performance standards, test preparation, lesson scope and coherence, student use of resources, and student responses to readers and writers workshops. These elements tended to enhance or constrain teachers' abilities to successfully implement readers or writers workshops.

Familiarity with Classroom Routines

Classroom routines are important organizing mechanisms in the America's Choice literacy workshops. Teachers who established classroom routines spent less time giving directions and organizing students and reduced behavioral problems. Students familiar with workshop routines can become more responsible for their own learning and can enable teachers to work with small groups or individual students. Routines can help both teachers and students to use class time productively. The technique we used to detect the existence of classroom routines and student familiarity with these routines was to observe how classes began. Of the 42 lessons observed, CPRE researchers were present at the beginning of 36 of those lessons. Of those 36 lessons, 30 (or 83%) began with visible classroom routines. Only six classrooms (about 17%) did not have any apparent routines for students to follow at the beginning of class time.

Seventh-grade Writers Workshop Mini-Lesson

As the mini-lesson begins, the teacher distributes a one-page handout of a poem entitled, "Adam, My Brother, My Friend," written by a seventh grader whose brother died. The teacher also gives students a handout entitled, "Adapting the Holistic Scoring Guide for Poetry." The teacher notes that this particular poem received a "proficient" score on the state Writing Portfolio. The teacher reads the poem aloud and then asks students to get out their logs and write a response to the poem, recording what they liked and didn't like, what elements of poetry they observed, and what emotions the poem evoked for them. Students write quietly for five minutes, then the teacher calls on a few students to share what they wrote. Next the students start to analyze the poem with those seated closest to them, using the scoring rubric. Students break into pairs and the teacher circulates around the room to keep them on task.

According to the teacher, the mini-lesson's purpose was:

> *To show that poetry is not just a singsong rhyme that they think it is, and to show that there is an emotion evoked, a story told, etc. I love that they realized the emotion that was in there. They finally get that it doesn't have to singsong rhyme.*

After a while, the teacher brings the students back together and elicits some observations of how the poem reflects the elements of the scoring guide. Student responses include: It maintains a purpose, it shows emotion, it pulls the audience in, it reflects back, and it has transitions. The teacher also points out some other elements like flashbacks, descriptive language, figurative language, and personification.

The teacher then assigns the students to continue work on their own memoir poem, which is due the next day.

Teachers established routines in a variety of ways. In some classrooms, teachers used independent silent reading as a warm-up exercise to get students ready for readers workshop. In other classrooms, students entered and began writing in their sourcebooks or doing other related work at their desks. In several elementary school classrooms, students knew to go directly to the carpet to prepare for their mini-lesson. In other classrooms, the sequence of activities of readers or writers workshop were clearly laid out on a wall poster and student behaviors demonstrated that these routines were well entrenched.

In the few observed classrooms where there were no apparent routines in place, instructional time was often shortened, as teachers had to spend time getting students on task. In some of these rooms without apparent routines, students waited for the teacher to begin the class by sitting at their desks, wandering around the room, or talking to their friends. When there was no established routine in a classroom, students relied on the teacher for guidance and time that could have been part of the daily lesson was not used effectively.

Sources of Lessons

When considering the effectiveness and appropriateness of a lesson, it is important to consider how a teacher selected a specific lesson for that particular point in students' learning experiences. An ideal America's Choice mini-lesson is one that is chosen by analyzing previous student work in relation to the performance standards, and highlighting areas upon which students need to focus to get them on standard. Less purposeful lessons came from external sources such as basal textbooks or test preparation materials with little or no analysis of student skill levels, or gaps in student skill in relation to the standards.

By simply observing a lesson it was difficult to determine a teacher's rationale for selecting and constructing it in that particular way, so we asked teachers about the sources of their lessons, and how they chose the lesson that was observed. About a quarter of the teachers reported that they chose their mini-lessons by assessing their students' needs. Roughly a third of teachers interviewed reported that their mini-lessons came from teacher's guides to basal reading series or curriculum textbooks. Another third of the lessons were reportedly derived from state or local test requirements.

Analysis of Student Work

Nine of the 38 teachers (24%) interviewed reported that their mini-lessons and related assignments came directly from their analyses of student work. One second-grade teacher reported that she chose her mini-lessons by doing a "gap analysis:"

> *I chose the lesson by what I see they [the students] are not doing. When I start to see a lot of problems in their writing, whether it be problems with dialogue or whatever it may be...that's how I usually decide...I really take it from them, from their work.*

A second-grade teacher stated that she chose her writers workshop mini-lesson:

> *...because I had evaluated their previous writing. And I had focused on that particular problem for the class...I determined that's what they needed.*

Basal Readers or Textbooks

Fourteen of the 38 teachers interviewed (37%) reported choosing their lesson from curriculum materials, such as basal readers or textbook teacher guides. A second-grade teacher stated:

> *I have a teacher's guide that I can look through and there are several good things in there I have already used, and I was looking through for more ideas for mini-lessons.*

Creating mini-lessons based on ideas from basal readers or adopting existing lessons from textbooks might be considered less than optimum because of their lack of connection to an assessment of current student skill levels and needs.

Conferencing in a Second-grade Writers Workshop

In a mini-lesson, the teacher poses the question: What are the five senses that inform? The teacher uses Cynthia Rylant's *A Night in the Country* to demonstrate how the author uses the five senses in the text. Nineteen second-graders help her fill out a flip chart and provide instances from the story where the different senses are used. Students are told to return to their desks, think about what kind of descriptive language they could use with the five senses, and write a description about a campsite outing with their family on a summer night.

The independent assignment is clear and students move back to their desks by table number. The teacher has a conference log and circulates to conference with pre-identified students. The teacher mentions that she knows when and what to conference with students on because:

> *I decide on conferencing topics by looking at the work students are doing in their writer's notebooks. I make notes on their writing on post-its and I direct them to work on specific areas or specific skills. I usually write down what I notice that they are not doing, what they are not getting, because that helps me too, and so I can go back and look at that. Then I have conferences with students about these things.*

Test Preparation Materials

Finally, 32% of the teachers told us that the sources of their mini-lessons were test preparation materials. Preparing students for statewide and districtwide standardized tests is an important and legitimate concern of teachers, reflecting a realistic tension that exists for most teachers in this policy environment of high-stakes testing. Yet some teachers were more successful than others at incorporating test preparation activities into the literacy workshops. We observed some high-quality lessons that were intended to prepare students for high-stakes tests and others that resulted in low-level, decontextualized forms of instruction. The quality of a lesson derived from test requirements was dependent on teachers' abilities to integrate this purpose with both student skill levels and meaningful activities. Distinctions among the test preparation strategies of teachers will be discussed in greater detail later in this report.

Strategies for Student Engagement

The America's Choice literacy workshop design provides teachers with a variety of instructional techniques to engage students in the processes of becoming readers and writers. Mini-lessons are intended to be short, targeted instructional opportunities to explore the strategies of authors and audiences. The design calls for access to a variety of leveled texts to engage students in reading. Book talks and author's chair give students opportunities to share their products and insights with their peers in a constructive environment. Teachers who capitalize on the workshop structures and incorporate their own instructional techniques while addressing student needs were likely to have classes full of students who were engaged. In the classes we observed, teachers used a variety of strategies to engage students in class activities.

Many of these effective strategies were associated with America's Choice, such as establishing classroom routines and communicating standards to students; incorporating creative, thoughtful activities; taking advantage of the workshop structure to allow for multiple activities in the classroom; and connecting to students during the independent work period.

Teachers employed different strategies to avoid student confusion during the literacy workshops. Establishing a familiar classroom routine reduced the possibility for confusion and allowed for more class time to be spent on an

activity. Posting a daily class schedule for students to follow informed students of how the class would be organized and enabled teachers to keep track of the time to move smoothly from one activity to another. Making students aware of the performance standards for a given assignment clearly communicated the criteria that students needed to consider while completing an assignment. Requiring students to take notes during the mini-lesson helped keep students focused on the topic being discussed. Making links to previous mini-lessons also helped students make use of a past lesson to understand a new lesson.

Creative activities incorporated by teachers also helped increase the levels of student engagement in the classroom. For example, incorporating a song into the mini-lesson helped keep one first-grade class on task. A second-grade teacher used a *short* drawing activity to capture students' attention and provided a different outlet for students to express their understanding of the book they were reading. One second-grade teacher allowed eager students to actively participate in the story hour by reading aloud with her instead of asking them to listen quietly. Other teachers read along with their students during the independent silent reading period, modeling the kind of behavior and practices they wanted students to acquire.

Allowing students to choose their own activities and work at their own pace may also contribute to high levels of student engagement in the classroom. One second-grade teacher allowed students to pick their own activity out of a list she created. Giving students a choice of activities to work on was a good way to ensure student interest in the activity. In some classrooms, multiple activities were occurring simultaneously. The teacher in one particular writers workshop organized the independent activity stage so that students could write at their own pace. Depending on the stage of the writing process they were in, some students worked independently at their desks, others worked in the lab or in the computer stations, and others formed small groups for peer conferencing.

Teacher Activity During Independent Work Period

Teachers' activities during the independent work period of the literacy workshops revealed a great deal about their understanding and interpretation of the standards-based instructional philosophy that forms the basis for the literacy workshops. Teachers who followed the recommendations of the model most closely took advantage of the opportunities created by the independent work period to provide additional instructional time

Author Study Mini-Lesson in Third-grade Readers Workshop

Fifteen third-grade students sit around their teacher in a circle. The teacher begins by holding up *The Goodbye Book* by Judith Viorst and asking students what they think this book will be about by looking at the cover. Students make predictions and make connections to other texts they have read in the past. Students name a number of book titles by the same author. The teacher reads the first page of the book and poses the question, "What do you think will happen next?"

As the students get deeper into the book, the teacher starts to fill out chart paper at the front of the circle. The chart is divided into three sections: predictions, noticings, and wonderings. The conversation is focused and intense. One student chimes in that this book is similar to another book she read outside of class. The teacher calls that a text-to-text connection, and points out that making comparisons between authors is one of the standards. Students go through the noticings and wonderings columns. One student notices: "Everything the boy says he won't do, he ends up doing." Another student wonders: "I wondered if this had happened to the author before." The teacher jots down the comments in the columns on the chart paper. The students then take out their writing notebooks. The teacher instructs them to write a response to *The Goodbye Book* based on what they noticed or wondered about the book, following the standards posted at the front of the class.

targeted to small groups or individual students to bring them closer to the standards for performance. Teachers who understood the design less well tended to use the independent work period to circulate and answer any students' questions. For teachers barely engaged in the workshop, the independent work period was an opportunity to catch up on their own work.

In some classrooms, teachers effectively orchestrated a variety of activities to take place during the independent period. For example, a fourth-grade teacher in one writers workshop class had her students working at very different stages of the writing process. The teacher asked each student to inform her of the stage of the writing process they were in (drafting, polishing, publishing, etc.) before she set them off on the day's task. Depending on their stage in their writing process, some students worked independently at their desks, others worked in the lab or in the computer stations, and others formed small groups for peer conferencing. The teacher held conferences with specific students during the independent work period who she felt did not grasp the purposes of their writing stage. This teacher took advantage of the writers workshop work period to allow students to continue writing at their own pace. In doing so, the teacher demonstrated to students that good writing happens in stages.

In another instance, a teacher conspicuously seated herself among her students and read along with them during the independent silent reading period. This kind of teacher involvement provided a model for students and sent a message about the importance of independent reading.

Conferencing between teachers and students provided another indicator of how effectively teachers used the opportunities created by the independent work portion of the literacy workshops and helped teachers focus on specific areas of difficulty with individual students. One third-grade teacher conducted a group conference with six students who were having trouble understanding a previous mini-lesson. This teacher was able to provide additional instruction to those students who needed it most.

While these kinds of thoughtful and targeted assistance strategies represent the ideal, only about half of the teachers whose classes we observed had a specific plan for the independent work period. In about half of the observations, teachers circulated around the room and made themselves available to students if they had questions on the assigned activity. This kind of "question and answer" interaction was the kind of student-teacher interaction one would expect to see in any class, and did not demonstrate the deliberate instructional opportunities the independent work period can facilitate. In fact, this practice may represent a misconception on the part of these teachers as to what constituted conferencing. As further evidence of the underutilization of conferencing, we found that just 38% of the teachers interviewed kept conference logs, whose purpose is to track and document the targeted assistance that teachers provide to students.

Time Allocation

Time allocation was another important indicator that distinguished the quality of implementation of the America's Choice literacy workshops. Effective time management allowed teachers to implement the three basic elements of the America's Choice literacy workshops—mini-lessons, an independent work period, and a reinforcing closing session.

In classrooms where time was ineffectively allocated, students' opportunities for practice and reinforcement were compromised. This was a particular challenge in the middle school classes where literacy workshops lasted only 45 to 50 minutes. Inappropriate time allocation resulted in a number of shortcomings. Most common were "maxi-lessons" which lasted for most of the class period, leaving little time for independent work and closure. When there was no closure, lessons ended abruptly and students were left without reinforcement on the purpose of the lesson.

Some teachers effectively distributed time across lessons, and navigated the lesson to achieve their goals. For example, one fourth-grade teacher, while bringing closure to a writers workshop lesson, appeared very aware of time constraints.

When her students began getting sidetracked on a separate but related discussion, the teacher skillfully helped her students to refocus simply by saying, "We're not going to get caught up in that." The teacher was able to redirect the students' attention and the closure resumed.

Connection to Performance Standards

Two powerful ideas undergird the America's Choice Design's philosophy of standards-based reform. First, all the teaching and learning that occurs inside of classrooms should originate from, and be guided by, the external standards for student performance. Second, students who understand what is expected of them (i.e., the standards), and are provided with strategies to address these performance standards in the context of an assignment, are more likely to strive toward and achieve these explicit goals. An implication of this is that students need to understand the connection between the performance standards and the assignment.

In our classroom observations, we looked for evidence that teachers were connecting their lessons to standards. In about 40% of the classes, standards for student performance were visible and teachers made explicit references to them. In another 50% of the classes, standards were displayed, but teachers made no explicit link to them in the lessons observed that day. Finally, in 10% of the classes we could not detect evidence of standards in either the artifacts of the room or in the lesson itself.

Standards were both displayed and teachers made explicit connections to them in their mini-lessons and/or closure activities in 16 of the 42 classes we observed (38%). For example, one third-grade teacher thoroughly addressed the standards in her writers workshop mini-lesson. The teacher began with a question and answer review of what students already knew about the writers workshop and informational writing. The teacher asked questions such as: "What are the stages that writers go through?", "What kind of writing are we doing now?", and "What are the elements of informational writing?" The teacher then reviewed the purposes of informational writing and told students they would focus on Element 6 of informational writing: writing truthfully. Students were instructed to continue working on their informational writing piece during the independent work period. During the closing activity, students sat in the author's chair and read what they had written. The teacher then called the students' attention back to the elements of informational writing and asked what elements, if any, did students hear of informational writing in what the students had read. This connection to standards helped students understand the purpose of the assignment and the criteria they should be following when completing the assignment.

In 22 of the classes we observed (52%), there were standards displayed in the room on either tear sheets or written on the blackboard, but the teacher made no connection or reference to these standards during the lesson. Since the standards were posted, it is likely that the teachers had introduced them to the class, but we could not determine how essential they were to students' daily work. Finally, four out of the 42 classes observed (12%) had no standards displayed in the classroom and the teacher made no reference to standards during the class.

Test Preparation

High-stakes testing is becoming more and more prevalent in the United States. Because student scores on these tests are weighted so heavily, teachers must do what they can to help their students perform well. Almost a third of the teachers in this study told us they were using their mini-lessons to help students prepare for state or district tests. While teachers' motives reflect a realistic tension, there are ways to prepare students for high-stakes tests that are more aligned with the America's Choice instructional philosophy. More consistent test preparation activities were visible in classrooms where the teacher taught the test content within the conceptual framework of the workshop, highlighting the big ideas within the domains to be tested, and giving students opportunities to apply these concepts in multiple reinforcing contexts. Other forms of test preparation resulted in low-level learning opportunities where

teachers taught skills in isolation from other lessons and from the performance standards.

In some classes, the skills tested in state and district tests were woven into the literacy workshops in ways that helped make the material meaningful to students. Some teachers successfully presented test-taking skills and materials in a meaningful way by incorporating their application into the America's Choice workshop framework. One seventh-grade teacher helped her students prepare for the writing portion of their statewide portfolio assessment by first discussing a poem that was written by a student and then looking at a holistic scoring guide. Students were clearly able to see the criteria by which their writing would be judged. The teacher then instructed students to write a response to the poem, including what they liked and didn't like, what elements of the poetry they observed, and what emotions the poem evoked. After writing for five minutes, students were asked to share what they wrote. Students then broke into small groups to analyze the poem, based on the holistic scoring guide. During the independent work activity, students were instructed to write their own memoir poem. This was a very thorough lesson that was discussed in the mini-lesson, applied in the independent work period, and reinforced in the closing activity. In keeping with the America's Choice instructional approach, students were made aware of the criteria by which they would be judged, and made adjustments to their work in an effort to improve their scores.

Other teachers used the literacy workshops to prepare students for tests with low-level activities. In one eighth-grade classroom, the teacher taught students how to divide words into syllables in preparation for the state test. Students were asked to pick five-syllable words out of a book that they were reading and divide them into syllables. Another teacher handed out a worksheet and asked students to underline misspelled words and correct them. In these and a few other cases, this test-preparation instruction was low-level and didn't apply to students' lives in a way to make the activities meaningful and memorable for them.

Lesson Scope and Coherence

The degree to which mini-lessons, independent work periods, and closing activities were connected was another key element that distinguished overall lesson depth. When topics of mini-lessons were not practiced in activities during the independent work period, students were not given a chance to apply what they learned and the purpose of the mini-lesson got lost. For example, in one fourth-grade readers workshop, the teacher spent the mini-lesson reading a story to students and asking them to identify the problem and resolution of the story. However, during the independent work period, students were asked to write a summary of and illustrate the story. In this case, students were not given an opportunity to practice and apply what they were introduced to in the mini-lesson.

When mini-lessons were applied to independent activities but not reiterated in the closure of the literacy workshops, students were left without reinforcement of the purpose of the lesson. By connecting mini-lessons to independent activities and reinforcing the purpose of the lesson in the closure, students were given the opportunity to apply what they learned and then reflect on the purpose of the lesson. By connecting the different parts of the literacy workshop, students were able to gain a better understanding of the topic presented.

Examples of lesson coherence were observed in a number of classrooms. In one third-grade writers workshop, students learned about one element of informational writing: writing truthfully. The teacher began the mini-lesson with a question and answer review of what students knew about informational writing. The teacher then asked students for examples of informational writing they saw on their field trip to the zoo the day before which enabled them to see that informational writing actually had a purpose and a place outside of the classroom. The teacher then read passages from different books and asked students to think about whether the writing was truthful or not. For the independent work period, students were asked to continue working on their informational writing piece. The closing activity was an author's chair where students read what they had written. The

teacher asked students if they heard an element of informational writing in what the student/author had written, and had them tell what they heard that was evidence of that element. Students were actively engaged in all parts of the workshop. This thread of coherence from the mini-lesson to the independent work period to the closing activity gave the lesson much greater depth and helped students gain a more thorough understanding of the elements of informational writing.

Student Use of Classroom Resources

America's Choice classrooms are potentially full of a rich set of resources for students to explore and use to enhance their reading and writing skills but teachers varied in how they provided and used these resources to enhance students' experiences. Some of these resources included: writing sourcebooks as a tool for reflection and a catalyst to generate new writing topics; writing folders for students' written work and as a way to monitor student progress over the semester; reading journals as a way to reflect on the texts students were reading; encouraging students to consult with their peers and to discuss their writing and the books they were reading; and the display of resources throughout the room, such as references to performance standards, and word walls where lists of new vocabulary words are collected and displayed for students to use when they were reading or writing.

While some classrooms had few resources, others contained numerous resources for students. In classrooms where there was little evidence of the availability and/or use of resources, references to standards and word walls were not present. In others, performance standards and word walls were present, however students were not observed using them. While sourcebooks were used in most classrooms, the manner in which they were used differed from teacher to teacher.

Some teachers had an abundance of resources available for students and encouraged their use. Two observations in particular demonstrated a good use of resources. Before beginning the independent work period, one first-grade writers workshop teacher asked her students to think about where they would get help to write. Students responded that they would use their sourcebooks, journals, or other books in the classroom library which would provide guidance on how the writing should be structured. An examination of the sourcebooks of this class indicated that the teacher made rich use of them as a classroom resource. The teacher also reminded the students that their writing folders contained a list of high-frequency words that they could also use in their writing. Students began working independently and used all of these resources in their writing—they even used their classmates as resources by consulting with them when they had problems and sharing their stories with them when they were finished. In another fourth-grade writers workshop during the independent work period, some students used their notes from observations made the previous day to help them with their writing, while other students referenced their sourcebooks to obtain pointers on writing.

Student Responses to Readers and Writers Workshops

Perhaps the most direct way to understand how deeply the America's Choice workshops had penetrated into classrooms was to talk to students. We interviewed 100 students from 34 classrooms about their reading and writing experiences, familiarity with performance standards, and strategies they had learned to make themselves more independent readers and writers. Of the 100 students, 51 were elementary school students and 49 were middle school students; 32 were interviewed during readers workshop and 68 during writers workshop.

Reading

Virtually all students reported that they were reading a great deal. We asked students what they did when they "got stuck" during their reading to see if they had learned strategies to independently work through problems they encountered while reading. While nearly all students told us how they get past words whose

meaning they did not know, most students did not have an extensive repertoire of strategies to cope with reading problems. Of the 32 students interviewed, 15 identified a single strategy and of these, 9 reported that they would simply ask someone for help, indicating a lack of problem-solving independence. Eleven students identified two different strategies such as trying to sound out the word or look it up in the dictionary before consulting the teacher, parent, or peer for help. Only five students identified more than two strategies they would use to get past a difficult word or reading passage. One seventh-grader responded: "I usually don't have trouble. If I get a hard word, I try to sound it out or ask someone. Sometimes I look in the dictionary or use context clues." A fourth-grader reported: "I do many things. I go and read it again. I read around the word to see if I can figure it out. I sound it out, or I ask the teacher." These students used multiple strategies to identify meaning.

Students were also asked what strategies they had learned to make themselves better readers. About half of the students were able to articulate specific strategies, including reading challenging books, doing story maps, and writing responses to what they had read. One sixth-grader commented: "I have learned how to read a paragraph and ask myself questions. That way, you can remember what the story is about. I ask, 'How does this page relate to the next page?'"

Another sixth-grader from the same class explained:

> *I learn vocabulary every day and that has helped with my reading and writing. Sometimes I read two pages and ask my friends to ask me questions about the characters and details of the story. Conjugating words has also helped. I use my sourcebook because it has things like elements of the story that I can look at when I am writing or doing a class assignment.*

Students who gave less specific strategies often said simply that they were reading more, or that they looked up words or tried to read difficult books that would challenge them. Six students could not articulate any strategies.

Writing

Participation in writers workshop meant that students engaged in regular writing activities. Nearly all students reported that they had done a tremendous amount of writing during the 2000-2001 school year. We asked students a series of questions aimed at understanding how well the writing process was part of students' daily practice, and the extent to which students had begun independently to use writing standards to evaluate and improve the quality of their own writing. Student responses indicated that they were more familiar with the writing process than they were with the use of standards to evaluate and improve their writing. The majority of students described at least a few steps of the writing process when asked what happened when they finished a draft, although some students described a more extensive revision process than others. Many students described a very simple process that involved having the teacher or a peer read their writing and make suggestions for changes, then doing another revision. Only about 15% of the students described a more extensive process, which indicated that they had developed a solid understanding of the writing process.

Of the students we interviewed, only a handful said that they checked their first draft against standards or a rubric as part of the revision process. Similarly, when asked how they knew when their work is good enough, only 11 students said they checked their work against the standards. As one fourth-grader told us: "It has capitals, it has punctuation marks, it has your name and the date. It has a good beginning, and it has the elements for doing the report."

About a third of the students (24 of 68) reported that they relied on the teacher to tell them when their work was good enough, as explained by this third-grader: "If you think it is good enough, you peer conference and then when you go to the teacher and she says it's good, it is good enough."

An even lesser degree of student independence was evident in responses to the question of what students did when they "got stuck" in their writing. Of the 68 students we interviewed, over

half said they asked the teacher or someone else for help. Responses from other students varied widely, but indicated that they had internalized some of the strategies introduced in writers workshop. Some of the strategies named by students were to reread the piece and think about it some more, consult their sourcebooks for ideas, sound out words (if the problem was in spelling words), or look around the room at charts or other reference materials.

About a third of the students (23 of 68) were able to name specific strategies they had learned to improve their writing and many of them connected this to the standards. For example, a third-grader commented:

> *Well, we've got standards to meet. Sometimes I go beyond the standards. I learned how to do text-to-text connections. I use transition words, and describe the characters. I learned how to do planning webs and have engaging beginnings. I also learned onomatopoeia.*

A fourth-grade student at another school remarked: "Like the standards tell us, we need to engage the reader, get their attention with a good beginning and ending. The ending should sum up the whole story."

Responses from students who did not identify standards-based strategies for improving their writing were difficult to categorize. A few students each identified steps of the writing process, talked about writing mechanics only, named procedural strategies, reported that they asked the teacher, or said they had not learned any strategies to improve their writing.

The data shared above indicate that in most classrooms we visited, students were reading and writing a great deal, and that the procedures for readers and writers workshops were established and generally understood by students. Most students were able to identify at least one strategy for improving their reading or writing, although relatively few articulated a repertoire of strategies. An area for growth is in helping students internalize standards as tools they can use to independently evaluate and improve their own reading and writing. Too many students reported relying on the teacher or another adult to help them when they ran into problems, or to evaluate their work. Although many students were familiar with the standards, few recognized the value of standards in helping them become independent readers and writers.

Implications for Deeper Implementation

In this study we have provided a national snapshot of the quality of literacy instruction in America's Choice schools after one and two years of implementation of the design. Through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and examination of multiple classroom artifacts, we have analyzed the fidelity with which teachers have implemented the workshop structures and identified areas that distinguish the depth with which teachers have enacted the principles underlying the literacy model. The findings of this report point to a number of lessons and challenges, both for the designers of America's Choice and for schools as they pursue more robust implementation of the design. We conclude this report by discussing the implications for deeper implementation that emerge from our study of the implementation of the literacy component of America's Choice.

Overall, there is much variation in the degree to which teachers have adopted the America's Choice literacy model in their classrooms. Our findings indicate that about 40% of teachers showed evidence of exemplary or solid lessons, about 45% exhibited partial implementation, and about 15% of the lessons only minimally adhered to the literacy workshop structures. Should we consider these results promising or disappointing? There are several ways we might examine this question. First, in contrast to the track records of other reform initiatives that CPRE has evaluated, these results are promising. There are many instances of programs that, although well intentioned, never achieve the direct influence on classroom practice that was evident in most of the elementary and middle school classrooms in which we observed

instruction. Even in the cases of teachers who are implementing only parts of the workshop structures, the literacy design has had a clear and recognizable influence on their practices.

Second, there is evidence within these data that these results are likely to grow stronger over time. For example, the observations conducted in schools at the end of their second year of implementation of America's Choice (cohort II) had a higher percentage of lessons that were either solid or exemplary (44%) in comparison to observations of classes in schools at the end of their first year of implementation (cohort III, 36%). These data suggest that teachers may improve their implementation as they become more practiced with the techniques and structures. CPRE will continue to track implementation to see if this conjecture holds true. Thus, there are several indicators that suggest that these results are promising. Even so, compared to the National Center on Education and the Economy's (NCEE) high expectation that all teachers who teach reading and/or writing will implement the literacy workshops, these results leave ample room for growth.

National designers and local implementers face a number of challenges as they seek deeper and more pervasive enactments of the philosophy of instruction that underlies the America's Choice literacy model. The teachers who made up our sample can be seen as fitting into two groups, each of which requires a different strategic response to move their practice more into line with that advocated by NCEE. The first group of teachers were those that are only partially implementing the structures of the America's Choice workshop design. It has been documented in research[1] that many teachers, almost subconsciously, cling to longstanding practices even when they try in good faith to implement new practices. In these cases, partial implementation—overly long mini-lessons, lack of coherence between elements of the workshop structure, missing closure activities, to name a few—undermined the intent of the workshop structure to provide students with repeated and reinforcing opportunities to practice the skills that will help them to reach the standards. These teachers clearly need to better understand the purposes of the workshop structures.

The second group of teachers were at a different phase in their development and may require different considerations. These teachers had a sense of the structures of the design, but lacked a deep understanding of the underlying purposes of these structures. These are teachers who, for example, conducted student conferences during the independent work period, but did not capitalize upon this time to target particular students for additional assistance or use conferences for a particular purpose. These are teachers who understood the structures of the literacy workshop: conducted short, targeted mini-lessons, but did not derive the source of their mini-lessons from student needs, but rather from some external source such as textbooks or test preparation materials. While these teachers understood the basic structures and purposes of the workshop design, they need to develop the finer-grained skills to capitalize on the opportunities that these structures create.

Our fieldwork with students suggests that their literacy experiences are a direct consequence of their teachers' understanding and enactment of the literacy model. Encouragingly, students overwhelmingly reported that they were reading and writing a great deal—much more than they did in the past—thus their exposure to books and writing were expanded. This appears to be an outgrowth of the steady diet of literature and plentiful opportunities to write that are rooted in the America's Choice literacy program. But students also clearly need more practice and exposure to the multiple strategies that are intended to help them to meet the standards and perform well on state and local assessments.

Many teachers are at critical stages in their implementation of the readers and writers workshop. If teachers view fidelity to the workshop structures as an end in itself, rather than as a structure to provide them with the opportunities to engage in ongoing investigation into the relationship between their instructional strategies and students' demonstration of

[1] *See, for example, David Cohen's case study (1990) of Mrs. Oublier, a teacher who felt that she was implementing reform practices when, in fact, her instruction was quite traditional. In Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 12(3), 311-329.*

mastery of the standards, then teachers will be implementing the letter, but not the spirit, of the reform. As teachers continue to explore their practice, they need to develop a deeper understanding of the rationales behind the workshop structures so that they can take advantage of the opportunities created by the literacy workshop model. America's Choice puts many structures in place that potentially allow teachers to have structured investigations into how their enactment of the components of design play out in their classrooms and influence their students' understanding. Many of the structures that the model puts into place—teacher meetings, study groups, and inter-visitations—all encourage and open practice to collegial examination and potentially provide valuable mechanisms to facilitate teacher engagement in ongoing inquiry into how students understand and respond to different instructional strategies. The challenge for America's Choice leaders is to more effectively employ these and other vehicles to engage teachers in sustained investigations of the relationships between their practice and student learning.

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